



## Liberia

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### **International Religious Freedom Report 2009**

**October 26, 2009**

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 43,000 square miles and a population of 3.5 million. According to the 2008 National Population and Housing Census, Christians represent 85.5 percent of the population, Muslims 12.2 percent, adherents of indigenous religious beliefs 0.5 percent, and other religions 0.1 percent, with 1.5 percent claiming no religion. There are also small percentages of Baha'is, Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists. Many religious groups incorporate elements of indigenous religious beliefs. Christian groups include Lutheran, Baptist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and AME Zion denominations, and a variety of Pentecostal churches. Many of the churches are affiliated with churches outside the country, while others are independent.

Christians live throughout the country. Muslims belong mainly to the Mandingo and Vai ethnic groups. Mandingos reside throughout the country, while Vais live predominantly in the west. Ethnic groups in all regions participate in the indigenous religious practices of the Poro and Sande secret societies.

#### Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Government ceremonies open and close with prayers and may include the singing of hymns. The prayers and hymns are usually Christian but occasionally are both Christian and Muslim.

The Government observes Easter and Christmas as national holidays. Some Muslim leaders felt that certain Islamic

holy days should also be national holidays. The Government mandates that public businesses and markets, including Muslim businesses and shops, remain closed on Sundays and major Christian holy days, an issue that Muslim leaders in the past brought to the Legislative Assembly and the Supreme Court to no avail. There is no legal requirement to excuse Muslims from employment or classes for Friday prayers, although some employers do so.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register their articles of incorporation with the Government, along with a statement of the purpose of the organization. Registration is routine, and there were no reports that the registration process was burdensome or discriminatory. The Government does not require indigenous religious groups to register, and they generally do not do so.

Public schools offer religious education, particularly Christian education, but do not require it. The Government subsidizes private schools, most of which are affiliated with either Christian or Muslim organizations.

High-level government officials were required to take oaths when assuming their new offices. Christians kissed the Bible and Muslims the Qur'an on those occasions.

There were reports of ritualistic killings, the act of killing for body parts for use in traditional rituals, from all parts of the country. The Government treated ritualistic killing cases as homicides and investigated and prosecuted them accordingly.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

#### Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Despite frequent interaction among Christians and Muslims, some tension existed. The Inter-Religious Council promoted dialogue among various religious communities.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Ambassador and other embassy officers expressed support for religious freedom and pluralism at interfaith meetings.